

24 March 1984

Duarte vows to bar US combat role

By Julia Preston
Globe Correspondent

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — Jose Napoleon Duarte, candidate for president of the Christian Democratic Party, said yesterday there will be no military coup in El Salvador, no US combat troops and no army officers on the CIA payroll if he wins tomorrow's election.

Duarte, 58, a moderate conservative who is the front-runner, also said he will not open direct negotiations with guerrillas of the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN).

"I don't see any possibility for a coup d'etat," Duarte said in an informal press gathering. "There may be a few [military] personalities who will be uncomfortable, but I don't think they will go so far as to destabilize the country."

In tomorrow's race, Duarte is running against his nemesis, rightist Roberto D'Aubuisson, 40, of the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), and Francisco Jose Guerrero, 58, of the moderate rightist National Conciliation Party (PCN), as well as five other minor candidates. A majority vote is needed to win; otherwise, a runoff will be held within 30 days.

When Duarte headed a ruling junta from March 1980 until April 1982 which included two army officers, he was regarded with suspicion by many military men and denounced as a communist by a few hard-line rightists.

But now Duarte, making his second and probably last try in 14 years at becoming El Salvador's fairly elected head of state, says: "If we get in we will govern and we will be obeyed."

Duarte also said, "In my government there will be no [military] intervention by the United States."

Speaking on the rebels' radio station Wednesday morning, Joaquin Villalobos, a top FMLN commander, rejected the elections tomorrow as "an imperialist project which is a cover for a plan for direct American intervention."

Not informed

Duarte said that as a member of the junta, he was not informed that Col. Nicolas Carranza, now head of the Treasury Police was receiving payments from the CIA, as was reported in the United States on Thursday.

Asked if he thought the CIA should develop paid informants in El Salvador's armed forces, the candidate said, "I would not allow it, definitely."

Duarte said he will not negotiate with the FMLN because "we don't believe in negotiating with the rifles over the table."

Instead, he said, he will try to reactivate El Salvador's economy, which registered zero growth in 1983. He promises to invite the rebels to a "national dialogue including all political sectors, without any selfish propositions of power."

He said he has had no contact with rebel diplomats up to now to explore the chances for the proposed dialogue.

Having been robbed of the presidency in 1972 in a fraudulent election, Duarte says this time, "if some mechanical things get worked out, the people will have the structure and the possibilities to vote."

But a crisis developed yesterday in the logistical preparations for tomorrow's vote. Technicians at the Central Elections Council discovered that 70 out of 363 polling places were in schools that had been either closed or destroyed.

As council members scrambled late in the day to find substitute polling places, the Christian Democrats presented a complaint warning that thousands of people might be blocked from casting ballots.

In an effort to keep leftist guerrillas from disrupting the balloting, 2000 army troops of the 5th Infantry Brigade fanned out through several towns in the northern province of Chalatenango which the guerrillas claim to be holding. Hurling mortars ahead of them, the troops encountered no resistance in the first hours.

Serious differences

The army's pre-election offensives have provoked serious differences between diplomats and military commanders on the leftist side.

In an interview Wednesday, Jorge Villacorta, a spokesman for the Democratic Revolutionary Front, the political wing of the opposition front, said there had been no decision by rebels to attack the elections.

He denied recent press reports that guerrilla fighters had been confiscating identity cards from travelers on the highways. He said it had been "a perfectly planned plot" by the Salvadoran armed forces "disguised as our forces, to discredit our front." Salvadorans must have the identity cards in order to vote.

But rebel regulars in the northern town of Tejutla, Chalatenango province, told reporters yesterday they would allow people to cast ballots, but would not allow elections authorities to remove the boxes from the town to count them.

In his radio broadcast Wednesday, rebel chief Villalobos said the 25th will be "just another day of war for us."

But there remain obstacles. In an interview last week, a retired high-ranking military officer with close ties to the right wing warned that some radicals in ARENA have been stockpiling arms to prepare to combat Duarte if he wins.

Duarte warned that he expects the armed forces to step in to "control any outbreak of violence" directed at his party if he wins.

Duarte, whose face is lined with scars he received in eight days of torture by police when he was imprisoned after the 1972 election, says he will put "any man, civilian or military" on trial for death-squad crimes if there is sufficient evidence.